

THE DEATH OF CHRIST AND THE ATONEMENT

INTRODUCTION

- The importance of the death of Christ is seen in the fact that it was:
 1. Foretold in the OT – Psalm 22; Isaiah 52:13-53:12
 2. Typified in the OT – in the sacrificial system (see Hebrews 9-10)
 3. Anticipated by Christ Himself – Matt 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19
 4. Proclaimed Repeatedly by the Apostles – 1 Cor 1:23; 2:2; 15:1-4; Phil 2:8
- Paul regarded the death of Jesus Christ as a matter of the most significant importance

1 Corinthians 2:2 ~ *For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified*

Galatians 6:14 ~ *But may it never be that I would boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*

- This is Paul's way of emphasizing the extreme importance of the cross of Christ to Christianity
- Read Matthew 27:27-56
- There may no more complex, mysterious, profound, yet glorious event than the crucifixion and death of Jesus Christ
- It has been aptly said that the gospel of Jesus is a pool shallow enough for a toddler to wade and deep enough for an elephant to swim. It is the truth about who God is that is accessible to the simplest of minds and yet causes angels to gaze at its infinite complexities.
- There are thousands of different facets to the death and sacrifice of Christ

Who can fully comprehend the cross? Yet who, touched by God's Spirit, can fail to appreciate it?

S. Lewis Johnson, "The Death of Christ" in *Vital Christology*, 120.

- The accomplishment of redemption by Christ at the cross has been "the atonement"
- "Atonement" defined: to atone is to make amends, to set things right. Theologically, it is what Christ accomplished on the cross through His suffering and death to secure the salvation of sinners
- The English word "atonement" comes from the two words "at" and "onement," suggesting unity or reconciliation, especially between God and men
- It is used 92 times in the OT, but not in the NT.....Although the word atonement is not a New Testament word, it designates what Christ accomplished on the cross through His suffering and death.
- Beginning with God's provision of a lamb in place of Isaac on Mount Moriah (Gen. 22:8), with the provision of the Passover lamb in Exodus 12 to the prophecy of Isaiah 53:7, where the prophet Isaiah indicated Messiah would go to His death, slaughtered like a lamb—the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to Messiah's atoning death.
- Undoubtedly, it is the consummation of that theme that John the Baptist describes in John 1:29 ~ Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world

THE CAUSE OF THE ATONEMENT

- What was it that caused God to send His Son to earth to become a man, live a holy life, and die as a substitute for sinners?
- God did not have to save anyone at all...He could have done what did with the angels who sinned:

2 Peter 2:4 ~ *For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;*

- He would have been perfectly just in leaving sinners in their sin...So why did He do it?

No treatment of the atonement can be properly oriented that does not trace its source to the free and sovereign love of God...God was pleased to set his invincible and everlasting love upon a countless multitude and it is the determinative purpose of this love that the atonement secures.

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 9-10.

- It was the love of God that caused Him to take steps to redeem sinners

John 3:16 ~ *For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.*

Romans 5:8 ~ *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*

Ephesians 1:4-5 ~ *just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will,*

1 John 4:10 ~ *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.*

It was of the free and sovereign good pleasure of his will, a good pleasure that emanated from the depths of his own goodness, that he chose a people to be heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ. The reason resides wholly in himself...

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 10

- Thus, the love of God constrained Him to save sinners
- But that doesn't answer the questions:
 - Why did Christ have to die for sinners?
 - What is the reason why the love of God should result in the death of Christ?
 - Why the sacrifice of the Son of God?
 - Why did God become man? Why did he die? Why did he die a death on the cross?
- These questions get to the need for the atonement

THE NEED FOR THE ATONEMENT

- Once God determined in Himself to save sinners as an act of His sovereign grace, love, and good pleasure, then the sacrifice of Christ became absolutely necessary
- There was no other way for God to save sinners apart from the death of His Son...His justice required it

- Thus, the atonement was not necessary (i.e. God could have chosen NOT to save sinners), but once He determined to save sinners as an act of His love, the atonement (i.e. the death of His Son) became necessary

To save lost men was not of absolute necessity but of the sovereign good pleasure of God. The terms "absolute necessity," however, indicate that God, having elected some to everlasting life out of his mere good pleasure, was under the necessity of accomplishing this purpose through the sacrifice of his own Son, a necessity arising from the perfections of his own nature. In a word, while it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only through substitutionary sacrifice and blood-bought redemption.

John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied*, 12.

Luke 24:25-26 ~ *And He said to them, "O foolish men and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?"*

Hebrews 2:17 ~ *Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.*

- Christ had to pay for the penalty of sins:

Hebrews 9:9-14

Hebrews 9:22 ~ *And according to the Law, one may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.*

Hebrews 9:23 ~ *Therefore it was necessary for the copies of the things in the heavens to be cleansed with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.*

Hebrews 10:4 ~ *For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.*

- The emphasis in these passages is on the finality, perfection, and efficacy of Christ's sacrifice
- Such finality, perfection, and efficacy are necessitated by the gravity of sin and sin must be effectively removed if salvation is to be realized
- Conclusion: There is a necessity that can be met by nothing less than the blood of Jesus

THE NATURE OF THE ATONEMENT

- At stake in the issue of the nature of the atonement is: What did Christ actually accomplish in his death?
- There are 5 categories that summarize the atoning work of Christ: 1) Sacrifice; 2) Substitute; 3) Satisfaction; 4) Reconciliation; 5) Redemption

Sacrifice

- Christ's work on the cross is a sacrificial work...his death was a sacrificial death
- The sacrificial nature of Christ's atonement is rooted in the OT sacrificial system
- Sacrifices were made to atone for sins
- Israelites offered sacrifices to God acknowledging their sin and making sacrifices for those sins
- In making the sacrifice, God was pleased because the price for sin had been paid
- The sacrificial lamb made a way for the sinner's sin to be atoned for

- The sacrifice was God's way for the sin to be covered and the means by which the worshipper was removed from divine wrath
- The OT worshipper would lay his hands on the head of the animal and thereby symbolically transfer to it his sin
- The sin of the worshipper was imputed to the offering and the offering bore as a result the death penalty

Leviticus 1:3-5 ~ *If his offering is a burnt offering from the herd, he shall offer it, a male without defect; he shall offer it at the doorway of the tent of meeting, that he may be accepted before the LORD. He shall lay his hand on the head of the burnt offering, that it may be accepted for him to make atonement on his behalf. He shall slay the young bull before the LORD; and Aaron's sons the priests shall offer up the blood and sprinkle the blood around on the altar that is at the doorway of the tent of meeting.*

- Shedding of blood is indicative of death...Blood carries life-sustaining elements to all parts of the body...It therefore represents the essence of life...Blood represents life
- So the shedding of blood represents the shedding of life = death

Leviticus 17:11 ~ *For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement*

- Since blood contains life, blood is sacred to God...Blood must be shed in order for death to occur
- And a death must occur if there is going to be a sacrifice
- It is the shed blood, signifying death, that atones for or covers the sinner

Q - Could OT sacrifices remove sin? (see Hebrews 9:15; 10:1, 4, 11; Romans 3:25)

1 Corinthians 5:7 ~ *Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed.*

- Christ is our Passover lamb – that lamb sacrificed in the Passover prefigured the ultimate Passover Lamb – Christ!
- In fact, according to Josephus, it was customary in his day to slay the lamb at about 3:00 p.m.
- This was the time of day that Christ, the Christian's Passover lamb died (9th hour)
- Christ's crucifixion and death was the ultimate sacrifice for sins
- The work which Christ came to do comes to a consummation on the cross

John 19:30 ~ *When Jesus therefore had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And He bowed His head, and gave up His spirit.*

- Jesus did not say, "I am finished," but rather "it is finished." He had completed the work that the Father had given Him to do; the work of salvation was accomplished.

Substitute

- Jesus Christ is the substitute for sinners...He is not the sinner, but he acts in the place of the sinner
- As such he is called our substitute...God treated Christ as if he was a sinner so He could treat us as if we were righteous
- An amazing transaction has taken place through Christ our substitute...He is our vicarious substitution
- Leviticus 16:5-10 ~ Day of Atonement
 - High priest was to take 2 goats: one was sacrificed and one was the scapegoat
 - The second goat was to be sent alive into the wilderness bearing the sins of the people

- Leviticus 16:20-22
 - Aaron was to place his hands on the head of the goat
 - And he was to confess the sins of the nation upon that goat
 - And then he was to send it away into the wilderness
 - The result was that the sinner's sins were removed
 - The goat was the substitute for the sinner's sin
 - Sin was transferred to the animal
- This was a picture of the ultimate substitution which Christ would fulfill
- This goat on the Day of Atonement anticipated the final substitution by Christ

Isaiah 53:4, 11-12 ~ Surely our griefs He Himself bore, And our sorrows He carried; Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken, Smitten of God, and afflicted...As a result of the anguish of His soul, He will see it and be satisfied; By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, As He will bear their iniquities. Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many. And interceded for the transgressors.

- He was not punished for His sins...He was punished for our sins

1 Cor 15:3 ~ For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures

- Notice the word “for” = in place of, on behalf of....this may be the single most important word in the NT
- It underscores the substitutionary vicarious nature of Christ's sacrifice...He died in our place!
- This great doctrine of the substitutionary atonement is the heart of the gospel
- Theologians have called this the “penal, vicarious substitutionary atonement” of Christ
- Penal – means paying the penalty...Christ paid the penalty for sin...God's holy justice requires payment for sin...Christ bore a penalty when he died
- Vicarious – means taking the place of someone else, a substitute took our place

1 Peter 2:24 ~ and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ~ He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

- God treated Christ as though he had committed every sin of the world though in fact he had not
- God heaped the sins of the world upon His Son, the Lamb of God, our substitute
- Why did God do this? → vs. 21 ~ so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him
- God treated Christ as if he were a sinner so that He could treat us as if we were saints
- He did it so He could treat us as if we lived a perfect life
- So when God looks at Christ, He sees our sin; And when God looks at us, He sees Christ's righteousness
- Unfortunately some have termed the substitutionary death of Christ “primitive and obscene”...archaic and antiquated

The sheer, hideous inanity of a god that demands a blood sacrifice from an innocent in repayment for the sins of the guilty...is a theology that captures the worst aspects of an archaic moral worldview, one that promulgates the barbaric idea of blood guilt and blood sacrifice. Modern Christians gasp in horror at those cultures that carried on the cultural values of this mindset, such as the Aztecs and their human sacrifices, or the honor killings practiced by many Islamic cultures today. Yet their central theological mystery, the Incarnation, Death and Resurrection of Christ, is premised on the very same archaic view of honor and morality as these throwback cultures represent. I don't get it. How does a modern Christian, brought up in an ethos of personal responsibility and individual dignity spout sentiments like the above without a hint of moral vertigo?

- Others have considered this a form of divine child abuse

The fact is that the cross is not a form of cosmic child abuse, a vengeful father punishing his son for an offense he has not even committed. Understandably, both people inside and outside of the church have found this twisted version of events morally dubious and a huge barrier to faith. Deeper than that, however, is that such a concept stands in total contradiction to the statement that God is love. If the cross is a personal act of violence perpetrated by God toward human kind but borne by His Son, then that makes a mockery of Jesus' own teaching to love your enemies and to refuse to repay evil with evil.

Steve Chalke, *The Lost Message of Jesus*, 182, 183

- Still others hold to a “moral example” view of the atonement...that Jesus' death served as an example to us
- This is Rob Bell's understanding of the atonement....there is no place for a substitutionary death – Christ didn't die for our sins nor did He take the punishment we deserved
- In this understanding of the atonement, man's great need was not redemption, not salvation from sin, not rescue from the wrath of God, but love
- We need to love one another or else we will destroy the world and everything in it
- What does love look like? → Christ came to show us.
- This is why there is such an emphasis on social justice in Bell's theology (clean water, overcoming poverty, stopping human trafficking, etc.)
- He says we bring heaven to earth when we follow Christ's example of love
- We bring hell to earth when we don't follow Christ's example of love

Satisfaction

- God gets angry at sin because sin destroys lives...sin enslaves people...sin damages what God has made...sin is an offense against his holy character...And so God must punish sin
- But the Good news of the Gospel is that He has poured out his wrath on Someone else: the spotless Lamb of God who sacrificed Himself as our substitute so that God's wrath might be satisfied against our sin
- Jesus Christ is the propitiation for our sins...propitiation means “appeasement” or “satisfaction”
- The term “propitiation” means to “placate, pacify, appease, conciliate”
- It literally means “to appease God's wrath...to satisfy the demands of God's anger toward sin”
- Definition: a sacrifice which satisfies God's wrath for sin
- The glory of the cross is that Christ propitiated, or satisfied, or appeased God's wrath
- The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross satisfied the demands of God's holiness for the punishment of sin
- God's wrath against sin was appeased or satisfied by Christ
- The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross satisfied the demands of God's holiness for the punishment of sin

Q – How is this understanding different from the pagan idea of assuaging the wrath of the gods by giving them something that will satisfy them so they won't do something bad to you?

Romans 3:25 ~ whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed

1 John 2:2 ~ and He Himself is the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

1 John 4:10 ~ In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins

Hebrews 2:17 ~ Therefore, He had to be made like His brethren in all things, so that He might become a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

- What God did through Christ was not remove our hostility towards Him, but His hostility towards us
- God's hostility toward sinners has been ended by Christ's death
- Propitiation was made by the death of Christ
- The glory of the cross is that Jesus stood and received the full brunt of God's wrath against our sin
- Christ's complete and sufficient sacrifice in our place turned away God's wrath and averted for the believer God's punishment
- When Christ was hanging on the cross, darkness came over the land for 3 hours
- That darkness was indicative of the wrath that God was pouring out on His son

Luke 23:44-45 ~ *It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour*

- For 3 hours, darkness enveloped the land...The only suitable explanation for this 3 hours of darkness is that God supernaturally blocked the sun as a sign of his wrath and judgment being poured on His Son
- On that day, nearly 2000 years ago Christ entered as it were the darkness of hell
- He took upon Himself the curse of the law...He endured the darkness of hell as He received God's judgment and wrath against sin
- There was no light on the cross, no friendship with God, no love from the Father, no fellowship with Him...only darkness, punishment, intense agony, terrible isolation
- Some have suggested that the darkness was indicative of God's absence at the cross
- But, in reality, the darkness is indicative of God's presence in judgment and wrath at the cross
- On the cross, in the midst of the pitch black darkness of God's judgment, Christ endured the most horrible, intense suffering anyone has ever experienced
- It was the spiritual pain of being forsaken by the Father and receiving the torment of the Father's wrath
- Christ was abandoned in the darkness of hell
- He satisfied and appeased God's wrath such that the judgment, terror, suffering and punishment that we would have endured in hell was concentrated and placed on Jesus in the space of a few hours
- That's why he cried out: My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

Q – In what sense was Christ separated from the Father when he hung on the cross as a sacrifice?

“Nowhere in Scripture is the reality of God's wrath more sharply manifested than in the forsaking of His Messiah. To be cursed of God is to be cut off from His presence and all of His benefits. The Incarnate Christ who enjoyed intimate personal fellowship with the Father, such as no man had ever enjoyed, was suddenly and completely cut off. Once the sin of man was imputed to Him, He became the virtual incarnation of evil. The load He carried was repugnant to the Father. God is too holy to even look at iniquity. God the Father turned His back upon the Son, cursing Him to the pit of hell while on the cross. Here was the Son's 'descent into hell.' Here the fury of God raged against Him. His scream was the scream of the damned. For us.”

R.C. Sproul, *Tabletalk* magazine, “My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?” (April 1990), p. 6.

Redemption

- **Redemption Defined:** The process by which sinful humans are bought back from the bondage of sin into relationship with God through grace by the payment of Jesus' death

Romans 3:24 ~ *being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;*

Galatians 3:13 ~ *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”*

Ephesians 1:7 ~ *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace*

Colossians 1:14 ~ *in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*

1 Corinthians 6:20 ~ *For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*

- The word “redeem/redemption” is the word *exagorazo* – comes from 2 words:
 - *agorazo* – to buy something in the market place (*agora* = a market place)
 - *ex* – out, from
- It means “to buy out, to redeem, to pay a price to secure the release of another, to ransom someone”
- The image here is of a marketplace where slaves were sold
- A master would go to the marketplace and purchase slaves off the block of slavery
- He would cause their release from slavery and grant them freedom
- He would pay a price (a ransom) to secure the release of a slave...a ransom has to do with setting something free that is held in captivity
- Some people believe that Christ paid the ransom to Satan...This is known as the ransom theory of the atonement
- It holds that in the transaction on the cross, Jesus paid a ransom to Satan because Satan held fallen man under bondage
- Satan was the kidnapper who snatched us away from God and Christ was the one who came and paid a ransom to the devil to set us free
- But the ransom for our redemption was not paid to Satan...it was paid to God
- When the Bible speaks of a ransom, it speaks of that ransom being paid not to a criminal but to the One who is owed the price for redemption, the offended party
- Who is the offended party? → God is...we broke his law and have fallen under his curse
- So Christ offered Himself in payment to the Father for us!
- He redeemed us by His blood, paid the ransom to the Father, and set us free from the curse of the law!

Reconciliation

- Reconciliation Defined: Christ’s finished work on the cross removes our alienation from God and restores us to His favor
- As sinners we are alienated from God:

Colossians 1:21 ~ *And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds,*

- But through Christ, sinners are reconciled to God

Romans 5:10-11 ~ *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.*

2 Corinthians 5:18-20 ~ *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.*